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Leisure experience beyond individual: A novel group-centric model for visitors in living museums

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ABSTRACT

This study develops and validates a novel model for understanding group visitor experience (VX) through the lens of the Serious Leisure Perspective by addressing a gap in research settings at living museums. Building on Pekarik's individual-focused VX model, we employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach (voice recordings, photovoice, interviews) with four groups (n=13). Five distinct VX dimensions emerged: object, learning, social, introspective experience, and engaging experiences. The findings emphasize social interaction as pivotal in group experiences. By providing a deeper understanding of group dynamics, this research offers insights into leisure, education, and tourism. Importantly, it enables the development of more enriching and satisfying group visits, aligning with the pursuit of deeply satisfying serious leisure experiences. This expanded VX model extends the scope of serious leisure research in museum contexts and offers practical insights to assist leisure institutions in formulating guidelines to enhance the VX during group visits to living museums.

KEYWORDS

Social interaction; visitor experience; leisure experience; living museum; group visitation

Introduction

Contemporary leisure and travel research increasingly prioritizes understanding how individual experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts interplay, utilizing diverse methodologies to investigate their influence on visitor perceptions (e.g., Adeclas et al., 2024; Li & Wu, 2020). Current scholarship advocates repositioning leisure and travel as transformative experiences, shifting the focus from mere satisfaction to cultivating psychosocial well-being beyond temporary activities (Zins & Ponocny, 2022). While acknowledging individual experience, a nuanced understanding of leisure requires considering social context, motivations, culture, and personal perspectives in shaping its meaning (Adeclas et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2022). This socially mediated perspective of leisure is particularly salient within cultural heritage settings. Cultural institutions such as museums exemplify this shift.

Museums, as vital cultural institutions, offer unique opportunities for social engagement and experiential learning within the leisure landscape. Evolving from static artifact repositories, museums have become dynamic and interactive spaces, actively fostering